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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 AMMAN 007308

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SUBJECT: JORDAN: SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION ON MEPI

SUMMARY

-- THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE MIDDLE EAST PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE (MEPI) RECEIVED EXTENSIVE COVERAGE IN THE JORDANIAN PRESS OVER THE WEEKEND, DECEMBER 13-16. THE SPEECH RECEIVED FRONT-PAGE COVERAGE IN ALL OF JORDAN'S ARABIC DAILIES ON THE 13TH, WITH REPORTING BASED ON WIRE SERVICE REPORTS. SUBSEQUENTLY, THE INITIATIVE HAS BEEN A MAIN SUBJECT FOR JORDANIAN COMMENTATORS. EARLY REPORTING CARRIED STATEMENTS BY JORDAN'S KING ABDULLAH II WELCOMING THE INITIATIVE, AND INDICATING THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF JORDAN SUPPORTS THE MAIN AIMS OF THE INITIATIVE AS A MEANS TO IMPROVE CONDITIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST. COMMENTARY HAS BEEN MIXED, WITH MANY WRITERS WELCOMING THE INTRODUCTION OF THE IDEAS INFORMING THE INITIATIVE INTO PUBLIC DEBATE, WHILE REMAINING SUSPICIOUS OF ULTIMATE U.S. MOTIVES AND CALLING FOR GREATER "BALANCE" IN U.S. POLICIES TOWARD THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT.

EDITORIAL COMMENTARY

-- "MEPI AND THE NEED FOR REFORM"

PROMINENT DAILY COLUMNIST URAIB AL-RANTAWI WROTE IN CENTER-LEFT, INFLUENTIAL ARABIC DAILY AL-DUSTOUR (12/14): "THE NEED FOR POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, ADMINISTRATIVE, AND FISCAL REFORM IN THE ARAB WORLD IS REAL, EVEN IF IT IS THE AMERICANS THAT TELL US ABOUT IT. WE SHOULD NOT SUSPEND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS WAITING FOR A SOLUTION TO THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT."

-- "THE ROAD MAP TO DEMOCRACY"

DAILY COLUMNIST JAMIL AL-NIMRI WROTE IN INDEPENDENT, MASS-APPEAL ARABIC DAILY AL-ARAB AL-YAWM (12/14): "WE WELCOME THIS POSITIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE POSITION BECAUSE WE VALUE DEMOCRACY AND YEARN TO BE ABLE TO ENJOY IT. WE CHALLENGE THE AMERICAN ADMINISTRATION TO IMPLEMENT THIS INITIATIVE AS A PACKAGE, AND WE SHALL ASSUME THAT POWELL'S WORDS SPRING FROM A CONVICTION. BUT WE MUST REPEAT TO THE U.S. ADMINISTRATION FOR THE THOUSANDTH TIME THAT THE KEY TO GAINING THE CONFIDENCE OF THE ARAB PEOPLES IS THROUGH SOLVING THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM. THIS IS NOT NEW, SO WILL THE DIALOGUE OF THE DEAF CONTINUE? ARAB INTELLECTUALS ARE NOW CONVINCED THAT THE PROBLEM IS NOT ONE OF CONVINCING THE AMERICAN ADMINISTRATION, BUT THE LACK OF AN AMERICAN WILL THAT IS INDEPENDENT OF ISRAEL'S WISHES. IN THIS CONTEXT, ANY PRESSURE ON ARAB REGIMES WILL FAIL BECAUSE IT WILL BE SEEN AS ZIONIST PRESSURE FOR SUSPECT REASONS, AND EVEN DEMOCRATS WILL FEEL THE NEED TO ATTACK IT."

-- "MEPI, AN ATTEMPT TO FILL THE GAP OF HOPE"

RAMADAN RAWASHDEH WROTE IN SEMI-OFFICIAL INFLUENTIAL ARABIC DAILY AL-RAI (12/14): "INTERNATIONAL POLITICS IS NO LONGER CONCERNED WITH WHAT IS CALLED NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY, BECAUSE GLOBALIZATION ALLOWS THE FLOW OF FUNDS AND INFORMATION WITHOUT CENSORSHIP OR BORDERS AND WITHOUT THE CONTROL OF THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, WHICH IS LOSING MUCH OF ITS PREROGATIVES TO BUSINESS GROUPS, CIVIL SOCIETY INSTITUTIONS, AND THE FREE MEDIA."

-- "THE AMERICAN PROGRAM TO REFORM AND IMPROVE LOGIC"

DAILY COLUMNIST MAZEN AL-SAKET WROTE IN CENTER-LEFT, INFLUENTIAL ARABIC DAILY AL-DUSTOUR (12/14): "THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT SHOULD NOT BE A COVER TO ADDRESS THE CAUSES OF HATRED AND ENMITY TOWARDS AMERICAN POLICY. THIS IS AN ISSUE THAT SHOULD START WITH UNDERSTANDING THAT ARABS HAVE INDEPENDENCE AND RIGHTS."

-- "TALK AND CONVICTIONS"

PROMINENT DAILY COLUMNIST TARIQ MASARWAH WROTE IN SEMI-OFFICIAL INFLUENTIAL ARABIC DAILY AL-RAI (12/14):

"SECRETARY POWELL MERITS APPLAUSE BECAUSE, AFTER A YEAR OF HEARING THE UNITED STATES THREATEN WAR, HE CHOSE A DIFFERENT LANGUAGE. WE WISH SINCERELY THAT HIS CALL IS SINCERE, BUT WE ARE CONVINCED THAT IT IS NOTHING BUT A SPECIOUS PROPAGANDA EXERCISE TO EMBELLISH THE IMAGE OF THE UGLY AMERICAN. IT IS NOT A CALL FOR GOOD, BUT A WAVING OF THE STOUT STICK. IS DEVELOPMENT IN PALESTINE TO BE ACHIEVED BY REOCCUPYING THE LAND AND DESTROYING THE PALESTINIANS' AUTHORITY? IS IT POSSIBLE THAT HE SEEKS WHAT IS IN THE BEST INTEREST OF IRAQIS, WHEN HE IS THE SUCCESSOR OF THE SECRETARY WHO SAID OPENLY THAT THE DEATH OF HALF A MILLION IRAQI CHILDREN IS ACCEPTABLE? CAN THE LEBANESE BE ASKED TO COOPERATE WITH AN INITIATIVE THAT DICTATES TO THEM AND THAT DUBS THE HEROES THAT LIBERATED THE SOUTH OF LEBANON AS TERRORISTS? WOULD THIS NOT BE A CALL FOR THE RETURN OF THE OCCUPATION?"

-- "WHO IS PREVENTING PALESTINIAN ELECTIONS?"

DAILY COLUMNIST MAHMOUD AL-RIMAWI WROTE IN SEMI-OFFICIAL INFLUENTIAL ARABIC DAILY AL-RAI (12/14): "SINCE SECRETARY POWELL'S INITIATIVE CALLS FOR REFORMS IN THE ARAB WORLD, WE SHOULD TAKE NOTE THAT PEOPLE OF THE REGION SHOULD HAVE THE RIGHT TO ORGANIZE ELECTIONS. IT IS IMPORTANT TO EXPOSE THE ONGOING (US-ISRAELI) COLLUSION THAT PREVENTS THE PEOPLE OF THE WEST BANK AND GAZA FROM HAVING THEIR ELECTIONS. THIS CONSTITUTES A FLAGRANT CONTRADICTION WITH THE AIMS OF THE PRESENT INITIATIVE."

-- "ONE MORE ABOUT MEPI"

DAILY COLUMNIST URAYB RINTAWI IN CENTER-LEFT INFLUENTIAL AL-DUSTOUR ARABIC DAILY COMMENTED FOR A SECOND CONSECUTIVE DAY ON MEPI (12/15). HE VIEWS THE THREE "PILLARS" OF THE INITIATIVE, ECONOMIC REFORM, POLITICAL REFORM AND EDUCATIONAL REFORM, AND SAYS THAT THAT THE AMERICAN VIEWPOINT OF THE ARAB WORLD IN THESE FIELDS IS JUSTIFIED. ON THE ECONOMIC FRONT, RINTAWI SAYS THAT THE "ARAB IMAGE THAT SECRETARY POWELL PORTRAYED IS AS SHAMEFUL AS IT CAN BE" AND GOES ON TO REVIEW THE SECRETARY'S STATISTICS ABOUT THE DETERIORATION OF ARAB ECONOMIES. ON THE POLITICAL FRONT, RINTAWI SAYS THERE IS MUCH TO BE DONE. ON THE EDUCATION FRONT, RINTAWI SAYS THE SAME THING. RINTAWI MOVES ON TO JORDAN AND SAYS THAT THE SECRETARY POWELL DID NOT MENTION JORDAN WHEN HE TALKED ABOUT PROMISING COUNTRIES IN THE FIELD OF DEMOCRACY AND FREEDOM AND WONDERS WHETHER "THE PROBLEM IS WITH POWELL OR WITH US".

-- "POWELL AND THE ARABS: INCREASING DEMOCRATIC IMMUNITY!"

DAILY COLUMNIST YASER ZAATREH WRITES IN AL-DUSTOUR ABOUT MEPI (12/15). HE BEGINS BY VIEWING THE ECONOMIC STATISTICS QUOTED BY SECRETARY POWELL AND THE CLAIM THAT THE DETERIORATION IN THE ARAB WORLD PRODUCED THE 9/11 ATTACKERS. ZAATREH ARGUES THAT THE 9/11 ATTACKERS DID NOT SUFFER FROM UNEMPLOYMENT OR POVERTY, AND THAT THE FACT THAT THEY WERE "LOW ON DEMOCRACY" SHOULD HAVE COMPELLED THEM TO ATTACK THEIR OWN GOVERNMENTS RATHER THAN THE U.S. HE ASKS SECRETARY POWELL: "DIDN'T YOUR ADVISORS TELL YOU THAT SUCH A DEMOCRACY WILL BRING MORE CONTEMPT FOR THE UNITED STATES?" HE GOES ON TO SAY THAT THE US ADMINISTRATION REFUSES TO DEAL WITH FACTS ON THE GROUND THAT LED TO THE 9/11 ATTACKS, NAMELY THE FACT THAT "THE CONTEMPT FOR THE UNITED STATES STEMS ONLY FROM THE UNITED STATES' HUMILIATION OF ARABS AND MUSLIMS, FROM STEALING THEIR WEALTH AND FORTUNE AND FROM SUPPORTING THE KILLING OF THEIR CHILDREN IN PALESTINE, THE MOST SACRED AND MOST IMPORTANT CAUSE FOR THE MUSLIMS."

-- "A FAILING RECIPE FOR A DISTORTED SITUATION"

DAILY COLUMNIST MUSA HAWAMDEH IN AL-DUSTOUR (12/15) ARGUES THAT THE U.S. IS ONLY INTERESTED IN DEMOCRACY IN AS FAR AS IT SERVES ITS OWN INTERESTS, THAT THE "DEMOCRACY THAT WASHINGTON WANTS IS A DISTORTED KIND OF DEMOCRACY. THE UNITED STATES WANTS TO OPEN THE ARAB LANDS FOR AMERICA FIRST, THEN IT WANTS TO GIVE ORDERS AND TO GET RID OF ANYTHING THAT COULD CREATE ANIMOSITY FOR THE UNITED STATES." HAWAMDEH CONCLUDES THAT THE UNITED STATES "WOULD SAVE MILLIONS OF DOLLARS IF IT WOULD DEAL WITH THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION AS A SOURCE OF TERROR AND WORRY, AND IF IT WOULD CONSIDER THE IDEA THAT ITS INTERESTS MAY NOT NECESSARILY COME INTO CONFLICT WITH ARAB INTERESTS IF IT WOULD BECOME AN HONEST COUNTRY AND APPLY UN RESOLUTIONS" TO ISRAEL.

-- "AN IMPOSED PARTNERSHIP?"

DAILY COLUMNIST HILMI AL-ASMAR IN AL-DUSTOUR WONDERS (12/15) WHETHER MEPI IS AN "IMPOSED" PARTNERSHIP AND

WHETHER THE "OTHER PARTNER", THE ARABS, WANTS THAT PARTNERSHIP. AL-ASMAR SAYS THAT HE DOES "NOT HOLD ANY PERSONAL GRUDGE AGAINST AMERICA AND ITS CITIZENS. IN FACT I AM JEALOUS OF THEIR GREAT ACHIEVEMENTS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE PROGRESS OF HUMANITY." HE ADDS THAT "AT THE SAME TIME, I BELONG TO A PEOPLE WHO SEE THEMSELVES AS VICTIMS OF AMERICA, JUST AS MUCH AS THEY SEE THEMSELVES VICTIMS OF DILAPIDATING ARAB AND ISLAMIC REGIMES WHO ACQUIRED THEIR OPPRESSIVE AND DESTRUCTIVE 'LEGITIMACY' FROM AMERICA'S UNLIMITED SUPPORT".

-- "WHAT HINDERS DEMOCRACY IN THIS REGION?"

DAILY COLUMNIST JAMIL NIMRI WRITES (12/15) IN AL-ARAB AL-YAWM ABOUT THE OBSTACLES OF DEMOCRACY IN THE ARAB WORLD. HE SAYS THAT "IF THE REGIMES IN THIS REGION WERE TO ABIDE BY WHAT POLLS AND BALLOTS TELL THEM, THEY WOULD BE FACING A REAL DISASTER, BECAUSE THE PUBLIC WANTS WHAT THESE REGIMES CANNOT ACCEPT, SUCH AS FIGHTING ISRAEL AND THE AMERICAN ANTICIPATED WAR ON IRAQ." NIMRI MAINTAINS THAT "THE REGIMES HAVE DEVELOPED AN IRON GRIP ON AUTHORITY BECAUSE THEY DO NOT TRUST, IN VIEW OF THEIR CURRENT POLICIES THAT ARE 'REQUIRED BY THE WEST', THAT THEY WOULD BE ABLE TO STAY IN POWER FOR A DAY IF THE FINAL WORD IS GIVEN BACK TO THE PEOPLE." NIMRI CONTINUES TO ARGUE THAT "NATIONAL AND RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM FEEDS OFF THE CONFLICT IN PALESTINE" AND THAT "SINCE THE CALL [FOR DEMOCRACY] IS COMING FROM THE UNITED STATES, ISRAEL'S ALLY WHO ACCEPTS EVEN SHARON'S BLOODY POLICIES, IT IS DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND HOW THE UNITED STATES IS GOING TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE SUPPORT OF DEMOCRACY WITHOUT CONTRIBUTING TO RESOLVING THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE."

--THE PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE, WHY DID THE REGIMES FAIL TO PRODUCE ONE?

COLUMNIST JAMAL AL-TAHAT WROTE IN SEMI-OFFICIAL INFLUENTIAL ARABIC DAILY AL-RAI ON DECEMBER 16: "THE VALUE OF THE INITIATIVE DOES NOT LIE IN THE FUNDS ALLOCATED TO IT, BUT IN THE IDEA ON WHICH IT IS BASED. BUT IT IS ALSO AN EXPRESSION OF THE TOTAL ARAB FAILURE, TO THE POINT WHERE IT SEEMS AS IF THE U.S. IS SIDING WITH THE ARABS AGAINST A BACKWARDNESS THAT IS OF THEIR MAKING."

-- JORDAN AND THE PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

PROMINENT DAILY COLUMNIST URAIB AL-RANTAWI WROTE IN CENTER-LEFT, INFLUENTIAL ARABIC DAILY AL-DUSTOUR ON DECEMBER 16: "JORDAN HAS A NATIONAL INTEREST IN THE SUCCESS OF THE AGENDA, REGARDLESS OF WHAT POWELL SAID OR DID NOT SAY, AND REGARDLESS OF WHAT ANY OTHERS MAY SAY. ONE SHOULD NOT REST ON THE ASSURANCE OF AMERICA'S FRIENDSHIP BECAUSE NO COUNTRY WAS A CLOSER FRIEND OF THE U.S. THAN SAUDI ARABIA, AND RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO HAVE NOW DETERIORATED. ONE WOULD BE WISE TO SET ONE'S HOUSE IN ORDER BEFORE HE IS COMPELLED TO SET THEM IN ORDER ON UNFAVORABLE TERMS."

-- POWELL'S UNLIMITED COMPANY

COLUMNIST USAMA AL-SHARIF WROTE IN CENTER-LEFT, INFLUENTIAL ARABIC DAILY AL-DUSTOUR ON DECEMBER 16: "THE MAIN PROBLEM IS THAT THERE IS NO ARAB PROPOSAL THAT WE MAY RAISE IN THE FACE OF SECRETARY POWELL TO SAY TO HIM: 'THESE ARE OUR TERMS TO ENTER INTO YOUR COMPANY.' THEN AGAIN, DOES HE EXPECT A RESPONSE, OR WOULD HE IMMEDIATELY POINT TO GENERAL FRANKS AND HIS BIG STICK? THIS IS NOT ROME OF CAESAR, IT IS NOT THE CRUSADERS' EMPIRE, IT IS NOT THE HORDES OF MONGOLS, NOR IS IT THE SYKES-PICOT ACCORD AND THE BALFOUR DECLARATION. IT IS ALL OF THEM TOGETHER."

-- POWELL'S PROJECT IS DOOMED TO FAILURE, AND THE PROOF IS JORDAN

COLUMNIST FAHED AL-KHITAN WROTE IN INDEPENDENT, MASS-APPEAL ARABIC DAILY AL-ARAB AL-YAWM ON DECEMBER 16: "AMERICA WILL SPEND MUCH MONEY WITHOUT RETURNS, ALTHOUGH THE ROAD TO GAINING THE HEARTS OF THE ARAB PUBLIC WOULD COST IT NOT A PENNY. IT ONLY NEEDS TO CHANGE ITS POLICY IN THE REGION AND THEN IT WOULD SEE NOT ONLY AN IMPROVEMENT IN SENTIMENTS TOWARDS IT, BUT THE PROGRESS OF DEMOCRACY, BECAUSE THE REGIMES WOULD THEN LOSE THE PRETEXTS OF SECURITY AND CONFRONTING ISRAEL." GNEHM